An official website of the United States government Here's how you know

Electronic Book Reader Dear Colleague Letter: Questions and Answers about the Law, the Technology, and the Population Affected

PDF (300K)

What are the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973?

- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is a federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability. The Department of Justice (DOJ) is responsible for enforcement and implementation of title III of the ADA, which covers private colleges and universities. DOJ and the Department of Education (ED) both have enforcement authority under title II of the ADA, which covers public universities.
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability in all programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. ED enforces Section 504 with respect to public and private colleges and universities that receive Federal financial assistance fro

TOP

What are electronic book readers and what are accessible text-to-speech functions?

- Electronic book readers, or e-book readers, are handheld devices that allow users to read digital books and other materials by displaying content on screens (often referred to as "e-ink technology"). Though features vary, e-book readers can hold a digital library of books, provide access to online content like newspapers and magazines, allow the user to highlight passages, look up word definitions, and link to reference materials.
- Some e-book readers have accessible text-to-speech functions that allow users who are blind or have low vision to hear the on-screen content read aloud, navigate device controls, and select menu options.

How many students with disabilities could be affected by inaccessible electronic book readers?

- *Postsecondary Education (PSE)*: According to NCES, as of 2003-2004, about 230,000 PSE students are blind, have low vision, or have learning disabilities. (Such disabilities, which may involve difficulty accessing print information, are often called "print" disabilities).
- *Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)*: In the 2006-2007 school year, NCES estimates 29,000 ESE students had visual impairments, including blindness; about 2.6 million ESE students had a specific learning disability, which likely includes some students with a "print" disability.

What does the Dear Colleague (DCL) do? Why did DOJ and ED issue it?

- The DCL expresses the position of DOJ and ED that it is impermissible under federal law for colleges and universities to use electronic book readers in classroom settings that are not accessible to students who are blind or have low vision, unless those students are provided an equally effective accommodation or reasonable modification that allows those students to receive all the educational benefits of the technology.
- The DCL highlights recent settlement agreements with several colleges and universities. In summary, the colleges and universities agreed not to purchase, require, or recommend use of the Kindle DX, or any other electronic book reader unless or until the device is accessible, or unless the colleges and universiti

TOP

provide a reasonable accommodation or modification that is accessible to students who are blind or have low vision.

- The DCL encourages colleges and universities to take steps to ensure that they refrain from using electronic book readers, or other similar technology, that is inaccessible to individuals who are blind or have low vision to the extent that a reasonable accommodation or modification for this type of technology does not exist or is not available.
- Colleges and universities can obtain technical assistance by contacting the DOJ toll-free telephone line at (800) 514-0301 (voice) or (800) 514-0383 (TTY). Colleges and universities may also seek technical assistance by going to ED's Office for Civil Rights website at http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OCR/contactus.cfm.

Top

Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

Page Last Reviewed: January 14, 2025

504 Plans

FERPA

IEPs (Individualized Education Program)

Teaching Resources

Become a Teacher

Professional Resources

School Safety and Security

Teaching Abroad

File a Report

Report Fraud, Waste, or Abuse

Report a Civil Rights Violation

Student Privacy Complaint Forms

About Us

Contact Us

ED Offices

Overview of ED

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Jobs at ED

News

Press Releases

Homeroom Blog

Subscriptions

Site Notices and Privacy Policies

Accessibility Support

TOP

ED Archive

U.S. Department of Education

ES

Contact Us

1-800-USA-LEARN

www.ed.gov

An official website of the Department of Education

About Dept of Education | Accessibility Support | No FEAR Act data

Office of the Inspector General | Performance reports | FOIA | Privacy Policy

ED Archive

Looking for U.S. government information and services? **Visit USA.gov**

TOP